

**West Mojave Plan
Task Group 2
Green Tree Inn, Victorville
October 3, 2001**

Attendees

Task Group: Mike Ahrens, Jim Arbogast, Margie Balfour, Mike Connor, Nick DallaValle, Jeri Ferguson, Ken Foster, Mary Grimsley, Pamela Hill, Harold Johnson, Joan Kahn, Paul Kober, Carol Landry, Paul Little Coyote, David A. Matthews, Lorelei Oviatt, Doug Parham, Nancy Perry, Fred Peters, Craig Peterson, Ed Phillips, David Potocki, Darrell Readmond, Ron Schiller, Debbie Stevens, Robert Strub, Hector Villalobos, Chuck Williams.

West Mojave Team: Bill Haigh, Valery Pilmer, Les Weeks

Introduction

Bill Haigh opened the meeting at 6:15 P.M. and introductions were made. Bill indicated the first part of the meeting would involve a discussion from a panel of participants in the on-the-ground survey, and the second part would invite preliminary thinking on recreation and vehicle access networks.

Bill indicated that a second e-mail line has been established for people to provide comments on the route designation process. The address is wmojave@ca.blm.gov. He also pointed out that a new feature has been added to the West Mojave website which provides a status update on the field survey.

Update on Field Survey

Les Weeks provided an update on the vehicle route network field survey. He indicated the following:

- The complete survey team has been in the field for two weekends. The survey coordinators were out for one additional weekend.
- A list of the 21 people involved in the survey was provided as a handout. Each two person team has an individual experienced in OHV use, and an individual with a technical background and knowledge of Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) units.
- Photographs showing the field effort were passed out.
- A list of the attributes being collected in the field was passed out.
- On the first weekend, the first two days were spent training surveyors. This included one day of classroom instruction and one day of field training. The field training included a calibration course to help ensure consistency among surveyors.
- Training took place at Jawbone Station.

- The current base station is located near Atolia, which provides good access to the El Paso, Red Mountain, and Ridgecrest subregions.
- The survey started with the El Pasos. The rationale for beginning at this location was the cooler temperatures due to higher elevations.
- Jeeps run through the survey areas initially, focusing on the primary routes. Maps are prepared showing the secondary and tertiary routes. The motorcycle teams use these maps to locate the secondary and tertiary routes using GPS equipment the following day.
- On the second weekend the teams covered between 600 and 800 miles of routes.
- The survey to date is going slower than expected. The first areas surveyed have a high density of routes, a high number of attributes to capture, and are located in more difficult terrain. It is expected that as the survey teams become more experienced, and the survey shifts to less mountainous terrain, the teams will be able to cover more miles per day.
- Older routes (possible RS2477 routes) will be captured later in the lab rather than in the field based on research of older and historic maps.
- In the field, surveyors are using the Denver inventory map, the Friends of Jawbone map, United States Geological Survey (USGS) maps, and a new map produced by CH2MHill that uses a USGS base and shows older routes.
- GPS units are downloaded into the computer and new maps are created each night. This helps keep track of what routes have already been mapped.

Les asked the panel of survey participants to talk about their experiences.

Jeri Ferguson is providing camp support. She noted the following:

- The Denver air photo inventory maps were used to establish boundaries for polygons where the surveyors would travel. Ten polygons were created.
- Les Weeks and Mike Ahrens determined which teams would go where. This decision depended on vehicle type.
- The second weekend CH2MHill provided 7 ½ minute topographic maps of what had been done the previous weekend. Corrections were made to the maps as needed.

Les Weeks noted that CH2MHill is providing quality assurance and control and is checking what has been mapped to look for problems and errors. Teams are also being rotated in order to maintain objectivity and to encourage cross training. Debriefings are being conducted each morning. He noted that the group is still learning how to make it work strategically.

Panel member Chuck Williams noted that the survey teams are made up of a diverse group of folks who are doing a good job of leaving their personal biases behind. He further noted that the teams found roads that weren't on the original inventory. He felt the survey gets easier as time goes on, and feels that all will benefit from the information that is collected.

Mike Ahrens provided the following observations:

- Programing and attributes have helped to bring objectivity to the survey effort.
- Attributes are being further refined with experience. For example, refining the category "rough" to include "rough/tame" and "rough/challenging." Also a category stating a route

is currently overgrown is needed.

- We will get a better picture of the true impact of vehicle use in the desert by categorizing the various types of routes. This cannot be ascertained from the existing Denver air photo inventory.
- The ability to do 30 miles per day per team will increase with time. Better refined attributes will assist in speeding the effort.

Bob Strub is assigned to one of the motorcycle crews. He is a civil engineer and has run survey crews in the past. He noted the following:

- Motorcycle crews have to stop in order to take GPS readings associated with an attribute. This slows them down.
- Crews have had to work around hunters since this is the hunting season.
- Crews are taking safety into consideration. If they feel uncomfortable traversing a route, someone with a higher skill level will do so later.

Debbie Stevens is the only equestrian representative participating on the survey crews. She indicated she has learned a lot from the OHV people and feels that controls are in place to ensure objectivity. Motorcycle crews have been following the single track route and marking where equestrian trails connect.

Les Weeks noted that the crews have experienced numerous flat tires and some mechanical failures. He complemented the assisting OHVs on how well they deal with these problems. The coordinators are being watchful over the teams and are trying to help those who need help including conducting additional training if needed. He still believes the job can be completed in 8 weekends, the last weekend being December 14th.

The following comments and questions were received from Task Group 2 members:

- **How is objectivity on the part of the participants being maintained?**
Les Weeks commented that the checklist does not leave much room for bias. Coordinators are also checking on people to see if their data can be collected in a repeatable fashion. He said that if bias is noted, team members can be replaced. Chuck Williams noted that rotating team members also helps maintain objectivity, and indicated that because they are only recording what is actually there, it is hard to cheat on the data. Debbie Stevens commented that the teams police themselves. She stated that having two individuals together and rotating the teams helps. Jeri Ferguson noted that every team is provided with a log book where they can write down additional observations or concerns they have while in the field.
- **Are equestrian trails being surveyed?**
Debbie Stevens stated that they are and noted that if a trail is too steep, the in and out locations are being marked by GPS.
- **Why was the Survey Advisory Group not contacted about the survey recently done**

in the El Pasos?

Les Weeks indicated that this was unintentional and that he would ensure the Advisory Group is consulted in advance of the surveys in the other subregions. The Advisory Group will also be used to help identify local user groups that can assist in identifying locations within the subregions of particular interest and importance to their group. Bill Haigh indicated that a schedule showing tentative survey time frames for the remaining subregions would be posted on the West Mojave website. It was noted that the Advisory Group still does not have an environmental representative. Doug Parham volunteered to be the environmental representative on that committee.

- **Will copies of the inventory be made available to the public after each area is surveyed?**

Some would like to be able to have any completed maps mailed to them prior to Task Group 2 meetings. Bill Haigh indicated that cost is a consideration. Staff will look into the ability to produce maps in black and white and will work with the Advisory Group to see what can be done.

- **Is aerial mapping available through China Lake Naval Weapons Center that can be used to assist in the mapping effort?**

Les Weeks indicated that while a good suggestion, it has been difficult to get assistance from the military since September 11th.

- **Some concern was expressed regarding the possibility of identifying routes that are questionable.**

The point was made that if questionable routes are not identified then they cannot be officially "closed", if that is the appropriate decision. Les Weeks emphasized the importance of ensuring that the data is as complete as possible. Comments were made by others that every possible route needs to be on the map. Once the inventory is complete, the decision will be made whether to keep a route open or not.

- **Why weren't local 4-wheel drive clubs asked to participate in the survey?**

Les Weeks responded that he only contacted those who had expressed an interest in participating. Jeri Ferguson added that those asked to participate had to be able to make a commitment to work on all 21 polygons over the eight week period.

Vehicle Access Network Design Criteria

Bill Haigh noted that the next phase will be to design the motorized vehicle access network for the West Mojave Plan, and that trade offs will have to be made to come up with an approach that supports both public access and conservation of resources. Haigh reminded the group that both goals set by Congress in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 must be met: for the California Desert, sensitive species must be conserved and appropriate motorized vehicle access must be provided. Haigh said that this will require creativity by the group: planning is art as much as science, and clever solutions will be required to resolve difficult problems. He asked

that people be ready to begin discussing this topic at the November 1, 2001 meeting.

Mike Ahrens was asked to talk about what one should look for when setting up a network of routes. Mike indicated that by entering recreational activity data into the route data base, we will begin to see a pattern of existing activity. Not every recreational activity is carried out in every subregion, but all activities need to be provided for somewhere within the western Mojave region.

Les Weeks added that as the GIS mapping is completed, we will be able to see differences between “types” of routes on the maps, and concurs with Mike Ahrens that certain patterns will begin to jump out.

The following questions were asked and comments made:

- **Do we have data to help identify trends in use? Can we anticipate what future needs will be?**
The type of data regarding existing use by means of surveys etc. does not currently exist for these areas. It was noted that the season and frequency of use of the routes should be considered during the designation process. For example, roads used to access hunting areas are primarily used at a time tortoises are not present. It was suggested that counters might be used on roads to determine frequency of use.
- **Need to work with CalTrans to ensure access rights along Highway 395 are not lost.**
Many roads intersecting Highway 395 provide access to BLM lands. Mike Ahrens indicated that BLM Lands and Realty are likely already involved in the discussions with CalTrans. He noted that the current survey will provide an additional tool for working with CalTrans to ensure continued access where needed.
- **Need to ensure that access is provided to wilderness areas.**
- **Is there any formula to weighting the two FLPMA goals of public use and resource conservation?**
Bill Haigh responded that both goals must be met, but that there was no set formula for this.
- **Where will the next surveys take place?**
Les Weeks indicated that for the weekend of October 12 the group would be working in the El Pasos, Red Mountain, Ridgecrest and Middle Knob. On the weekend of 10/26, they hope to wrap up Red Mountain and move on. Because the schedule depends on how the previous weekend went, he cannot be any more specific.

Next Meeting Date

Thursday, November 1, 2001
6:00 to 9:00 P.M.

Green Tree Inn, Victorville